

By Ben Wright

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If a spending bill isn't approved by Friday to fund the U.S. government this budget year, some civil service workers may be furloughed but soldiers will continue their duties, U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop Jr. said Friday during a visit to Fort Benning.

"It will be very limited," Bishop, D-Albany, said after a nearly two-hour meeting at the Army Community Services Center. "Perhaps some of the civil service employees will be furloughed or perhaps they would have days when they are on or off, but the essential functions of Fort Benning I'm certain will continue."

In addition to funding the nation's budget, a group of about 60 soldiers and spouses voiced concerns about health care, housing and facing bottlenecks while construction continues on Dixie Road.

Bishop, who represents the 2nd Congressional District, couldn't state whether the government would shutdown but said Congress is mixed on what needs to happen with the budget. "There are some folks who feel that more cuts needs to be made. Some folks especially on Senate side feel that fewer cuts need to be made. We just have to step up and do what needs to be done."

Bishop said all agencies including the Department of Defense have contingency plans to keep all of those essential services operational until an appropriations bill is passed and becomes law. Fort Benning has almost 4,000 civilian employees, a post official said.

"Each agency will have some sense of what they will do in the interim," Bishop said. "Hopefully we won't get there. I will do everything I can to persuade my colleagues to come to a reasonable resolution of the various issues so that we can go forward."

U.S. Rep. Lynn Westmoreland, who represents the 3rd Congressional District and wants more cuts in spending, said a government shutdown is absolutely not something he is in favor of.

“However, the spending spree congressional Democrats and President Obama have been on have left us with nine percent unemployment and more than \$14 trillion in debt,” Westmoreland, R-Grantville, said in a statement. “Senate Democrats need to understand three simple words: We are broke. We cannot continue to afford funding the government at the same levels we are now. Serious changes need to be made to the way the federal government spends money or we are going to leave our children and grandchildren drowning in debt they can never repay. I hope when they return to Washington next week that Senate Democrats will be willing to come to the table and discuss some serious cuts to federal spending. House Republicans have worked to pass a continuing resolution to fund the government -- if Senate Democrats cannot do the same, they are forcing a government shutdown.”

To reduce a deficit that's topping \$14 trillion, Army Maj. Charles Hamlin asked Bishop about a proposal to pay a small copay for health care costs. “We only have so many dollars,” Hamlin said. “Americans say cut, cut, cut but nobody is willing to do that.”

Paying a small copay of \$3, \$4 or \$5 for dependents' medical care could keep the government from sending 7,000 troops home in a reduction of force. “We have to think outside of the box,” said Hamlin.